

Soviet Arms-Control Expert Asks Nuclear Balance

By FLORA LEWIS

Special to The New York Times

MOSCOW, Aug. 30 — A member of the Soviet General Staff has said in an interview here that no arms control agreement "will be of any value" if the United States starts a cruise missile race while seeking reduction in the number of heavy missiles.

The officer, Maj. Gen. Viktor Starodubov, who is also a member of the Soviet team in the Geneva talks on reducing strategic weapons and of the Soviet-American standing consultative committee set up to monitor the 1972 strategic arms treaty, made it clear that he was speaking for the Soviet military establishment.

The theme of his remarks during a three-hour talk last Thursday was that the Soviet Union was not seeking superiority over the United States, but would not accept inferiority at any stage of an arms reduction process.

Cruise Missile Seen as Issue

"Security is our highest interest," he said. "We think it is dangerous if the United States is superior in some types of arms. The Americans could exploit superiority for political purposes, and from that, it would not be a long way to conflict. We require balance at all stages of reductions, even at the lowest levels."

Speaking in Russian through an interpreter, the 56-year-old officer mentioned cruise missiles as an example of

what, in Soviet eyes, was a United States attempt to gain an edge in a new kind of weaponry while negotiating limits on older types.

He stressed Soviet insistence on an overall East-West nuclear balance, including the British and French arsenals, which the Soviet Union counts in the equation but the United States does not.

Asked for the rationale of Soviet arms policy, he said:

"We have always been following the United States on the arms issue. History shows that the Soviet Union has never been superior to the United States in strategic arms. Why is the United States initiating an arms race? If there is a cruise missile race, the United States is likely to complain about Soviet cruise missiles or anything else we might develop to compensate."

Referring to the Ohio class of submarines, the United States' most modern, and the Typhoon, the Soviet equivalent, he continued:

"We had proposed a ban on Ohio and Typhoon type nuclear submarines. The United States rejected it and now both sides are starting to deploy them."

Specific Answers Avoided

An attempt to draw the general out into a discussion of the assumptions underlying Soviet strategic thought was unavailing. He said the basic Soviet policy was peace and a stable balance, but he did not answer specific questions after having said he could not discuss

any details of the Geneva talks, which both sides have agreed to keep confidential.

Asked whether, as some American analysts believe, the Soviet Union now regretted having rejected the deep cuts proposed by Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance in 1977, the general said no.

He said the Russians had rejected the Carter Administration's initiative for the same reason that they have rejected the latest proposals of President Reagan for deep cuts in heavy missiles, which are the mainstay of the Soviet arsenal.

"The United States is asking us to reduce arms that are the basis of Soviet defense," General Starodubov said. "It contends that its arms are not so destabilizing as ours. Our feeling is that, in a strategic situation, all factors, all types of arms, must be taken into account."

Western European Systems Noted

At that point, he drew two columns on a sheet of paper, representing current American and Soviet arsenals, with a smaller column beside them representing the United States' forward-based systems in Western Europe and allied systems. The small column does not make much difference when the two others are high, he said, but as the big arsenals are drawn down, it becomes increasingly important.

"We gave our computer all the information, and we asked to what level we could go safely," General Starodubov

said. He then mentioned a published report saying that the Soviet Union had proposed a limit of 1,800 missile launchers, compared to the Reagan proposal of 850. He said he could neither confirm nor deny the report because of the agreement not to give details of the Geneva exchanges.

When the general was asked whether the Soviet Union favored combining the parallel talks in Geneva on strategic, or intercontinental, nuclear weapons and on medium-range weapons, he said, "A merger would be impossible at this stage, but there is a direct link."

He was also asked about a recent statement by a West German Government spokesman that Bonn was asking for a clarification of Leonid I. Brezhnev's pledge in March not to deploy new SS-20 missiles targeted on Western Europe, in light of intelligence showing that a new base had been added. The general brushed the statement aside as being based on a false press report.

He refused to answer a question about the total number of SS-20's that were to be deployed, compared to the total of 572 American missiles fixed by the Atlantic alliance for deployment if the current arms-reduction talks fail.

But he repeatedly insisted that the Soviet Union sought only a balance in strategic weapons.

"If a state has a policy of peace," he said, "it will never seek superiority. It is a dangerous madness to count on victory."